DEPICTIONS OF MADNESS IN VOCAL MUSIC

by

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Introduction

Madness in theatrical settings has a long history, presumably because madness is a human condition with a long history. The first documented sources can be traced back to the '*dramma per musica*' production of *La finta pazza* composed by Francesco Sacrati with a libretto by Giulo Strozzi which premiered in Venice in the year 1641.[1] But for this document, I will limit discussion to the general components of effective mad scenes; *stylistic qualities* of the music, *performance innovations* (turned tropes), and *audience perspectives* within generalized historical cultural biases.

So, what is madness? And how does it apply to musical drama? Well, one could state that "mental illnesses are health conditions involving changes in thinking, emotion or behavior (or a combination of these). [And] mental illnesses are associated with distress and/or problems functioning in social, work or family activities."[2] But consider this a relatively new definition that neatly describes madness in its current state of clinical address. Merriam-Webster offers more colorful descriptions as follows:[3]

1 : the quality or state of being mad: such as

a : a state of severe mental illness —not used technically

- … fortifications against an inner darkness, the threat of *madness* that crouched above him throughout his life. ---Robert F. Moss

b : behavior or thinking that is very foolish or dangerous **:** extreme folly

- an idea that is pure/sheer *madness*

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[1] Brown, Howard Mayer, Ellen Rosand, Reinhard Strohm, Michel Noiray, Roger Parker, Arnold Whittall, Roger Savage, and Barry Millington. "Opera (i)." *Grove Music Online.* 9 Jul. 2018. http:////www.oxfordmusiconline.com/grovemusic/view/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.001.0001/omo-9781561592630-e-0000040726.

[2] https://www.psychiatry.org/patients-families/what-is-mental-illness

[3] https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/madness

c : ecstasy, enthusiasm

d : intense anger **:** rage

In music, as in theater, we have come to accept these *casual* labels of madness defined by conventional idioms to include visual cues of rendering clothing, disheveled appearance, sudden movement, and aural cues of wide jagged melodic leaps, extreme dynamic contrast, tempo and rhythmic contrast, repetition of pitches and words, etc. that stand out among the usual expectations to suggest 'otherness'. However, those who embody 'otherness' have been treated differently throughout time depending on the perspective *du jour*, and that is reflected in how mad scenes are written, portrayed and received. In other words, music directly reflects the perception of madness through the lens of time in which it was written. Why do I say this? Because, the universal stylistic qualities that signify 'madness' are effectively manipulated in music of different time periods as a measurement of the general population's sympathetic (or lack thereof) perception of madness. *Madness hasn't changed, but the audience view of madness has*. *And THAT contrast is what differentiates one mad scene from another.* What came first, the music to change the perception, or the perception reflected in the music, I will not debate. Rather, I simply wish to place a relationship between audience and music together on this one topic as it continues to evolve as a marker for societal temperament.

Chapter 1: Stylistic Qualities

Extremes attract attention, good or bad. (At some point, too much, too little, too high, too low, too fast, too slow and so forth becomes noticeably different than everyday status quo.) One may recall the comedic fodder of *opera buffa* with stock characters from *commedia dell'arte* that capitalize on extremes of character including the fool who embodies "extreme folly"—or, perhaps what we can interpret as madness, according to the Merriam-Webster definition mentioned earlier. The fool easily morphed into the operatic archetypical *basso buffo[e]*, meaning, "literally "funny" basses [which] are lyrical roles that demand from their practitioners a solid coloratura technique, a capacity for patter singing and ripe tonal qualities if they are to be brought off to maximum effect."[4] Similarly, many of these same characteristics apply to the counterpoint of melodramatic soprano mad scenes in that they also explore extended range, coloratura, and tonal color, albeit usually with less comedy and more pathos.

Beyond working these stylistic traits into the melodies of madness, composers also employ carefully arranged harmonies distinguished by psychological discorded dissonance. Often, this is deliberately contrasted poignantly with pleasant tonal passages to suggest how greatly a character has fallen from a sane state of being. (See example 1, Bess of Bedlam by Purcell.) Or, for another example, as the reformist opera composer Gluck did in his opera *Iphigénie en Tauride*, the use of a pleasant melodic tune with gentle harmony underlying an angsty libretto created what we would now call cognitive dissonance. In such a case, the audience voyeuristically watches the character's mental and emotional crisis when the character is fully unaware of his own completely unpinned mental and emotional reasoning. (See example 2, *Iphigénie en Tauride* by Gluck.)

Still another tactic to depict unhinged mental states is the careful timing of harmonic shifts. In "La mort d'Ophélie, Berlioz obsessively stays locked in repetitive harmonies that shift slightly from time to time much like the subtle Schubertian harmonic shifts that came before him and the similar Phillip

[4] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bass_(voice_type)#Basso_buffo

Glass harmonic shifts that came far later. The incremental changes hover and twist around the *idée fixe* making obvious an extreme obsessive-compulsive quality. (See example 3, *La mort d'Ophélie* by Berlioz.) This obsessiveness can also be described by repeating words ad nauseam. In Ned Rorem's "Visits to St. Elizabeths" (1950), a musical setting of metrically rhythmic piano accompaniment coheres to the repetitious poem based on the add-on nursery rhyme "This is the house that Jack built". The 1956 poem was written by Elizabeth Bishop, after her time as Consultant in Poetry to the Library of Congress. While in the Washington D.C. area, she made several visits to the American poet Ezra Pound who was housed at St. Elizabeth's after being tried for treason for his WWII Fascist and anti-Semitic broadcasts and writings in Italy and judged to be insane.[5] In the poem, the contrast between the famous poet and the squalid environment is striking. "The narrator's meditation involves a realization of both these extremes, of both the splendors and miseries of the poem's central figure."[6] (See example 4, Visits to St. Elizabeths (1950) by Rorem.)

[5] Elizabeth Bishop, "Visits to St. Elizabeths," LITMED: Literature Arts Medicine Database, June 13, 2005, accessed March 01, 2018, http://medhum.med.nyu.edu/view/11784.

[6] "Visits to St. Elizabeths - Summary" Masterpieces of American Literature Ed. Steven G. Kellman, eNotes.com, Inc. 2006 eNotes.com 24 Feb. 2018 http://www.enotes.com/topics/visits-st-elizabeths#summary-the-work.

Chapter 2: Performance Innovations

Between the music a composer creates and the expectant audience which consumes it lies the performer who translates as middle man. The middle man is an artist who conveys the conceptual intentions of the composer for full effective communication. Or, conversely, artists also have the weighty power to abuse or neglect the composer's intentions when they distill a composition via performance for the audience. There are other translators of varying degrees such as conductors, scenery designers, costumers, orchestra members and more, but for music works relating to madness, let us look at singers as the prominent communicators. What makes singers particularly effective? To start, it's obvious that there is a visual component that connects singers to an audience. Unlike instrumentalists who perform behind or attached to their exterior instruments, the singer's image is almost always unobstructed or enhanced in some way---such as in the case of costuming. This exposed view is ripe for performance innovations that aide the singer's efforts to communicate in the form of gesture, for unlike their instrumental counterparts, a singer's hands tend to be free. This use of gesture has a long history. Isabella Canali Andreini, who was commonly referred to as the greatest Renaissance actress, is an early documented example.

> She created a singularly exalted and influential variation on the inamorata type, elevating her love-scenes using improvised and memorized poetry, foreign languages, and learned allusions and detours into philosophy. On occasion she could also wield the clowns *bastonata* or mimic the *zanni* and in her famous mad scenes she could dance, sing, and declaim wildly in many languages and dialects, switching from comic to tragic modes in an instant. She had her first great triumph playing a madwoman in *La pazzia* at a Medici court wedding in 1589, a performance that became her trademark.[7]

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[7] Pamela Allen Brown, "'Cattle of This Colour': Boying the Diva in "As You Like It"," *Early Theatre* 15, no. 1 (2012): 145-66, http://www.jstor.org.proxyiub.uits.iu.edu/stable/43499607. Brown cites James M. Saslow, *The Medici Wedding of 1589: Florentine Festival As Theatrum Mundi.* New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996., Clubb, *Italian Drama* 262-6., and Eric Nicholson, '*Ophelia Sings Like a Prima Donna Innamorata*'. "Nicholson

Likewise, Anna Renzi enjoyed a similar reputation due to her interpretations of madness, such as for her character Deidamia in *La finta pazza (The feigned madwoman).* The librettist, Strozzi, writes;

> The action that gives soul, spirit, and existence to things must be governed by the movements of the body, by gestures, by the face and by the voice, now raising it, now lowering it, becoming enraged and immediately becoming calm again; at times speaking hurriedly, at others slowly, moving the body now in one, now in another direction, drawing in the arms, and extending them, laughing and crying, now with little, now with much agitation of the hands. Our Signora Anna is endowed with such lifelike expression that her responses and speeches seem not memorized but born at the very moment. In sum, she transforms herself completely into the person she represents… [8]

After Renzi's time, other women continued to garner fame in their compelling portrayals of mad scenes. Elizabeth Barry and Anne Bracegirdle were highly praised actresses in restoration England known for their sung mad scenes in theatrical performances.[9] Similarly, in the 19th century, singers such as Grisi, Pasta and Malibran ruled the stage and satiated audience appetites with their expert deliveries. Composers continued to write for such attractions. For example, Bellini worked closely in the production of his music and in choosing singers, so it can be assumed that he appreciated the gesture innovations for which *attrice cantante* Giuditta Pasta (1797-1865) was famous. Before he wrote the roles of Amina in *La Sonnambula* and the protagonist's role in *Norma* for her, she made impressions on critics earlier in her career when she performed Giovanni Paisiello's *Nina, o sia la pazza per amore (Nina, or the Girl Driven Mad by Love)*.[10] Contemporary critic, Ritorni, says, "Pasta, not with pantomimic gestures, but with the

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shows that the complex theatregram of female madness was international in scope and shaped Ophelia's tragicomic madness," 149.

[8] Ellen Rosand. *Monteverdi's last operas: a Venetian trilogy* (Berkeley : University of California Press, c2007), accessed July 20, 2018, 242.

[9] Kathryn Lowerre, *The lively arts of the London stage: 1675-1725* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2014).

[10] Susan Rutherford,"'La Cantante Delle Passioni': Giuditta Pasta and the Idea of Operatic Performance," *Cambridge Opera Journal* 19, no. 2 (2007): 107-38, http://www.jstor.org.proxyiub.uits.iu.edu/stable/27607154, 119.

action of a living picture, herself composes in opera a second part of mute representation, sometimes better than that which the poet and the composer have written for her to declaim."[11]

> Her means of representation exemplify the contradictions inherent in an era increasingly divided between older ideas of an idealised 'truth' and more progressive notions of early realism. With regard to the latter, her sensibility and use of 'real' experience (both markers of the new, 'Romantic' actor) feature prominently in the descriptions of Stendhal, who claimed she had learnt her acting from 'her own acutely sensitive reactions to the most delicate nuances of human passions': and that her 'genius as a tragic actress is made up of a thousand-and-one little casual observations' from real life that she had been assembling since the age of six.[12]

This development of acting style is directly correlated to the tastes of the pubic which the composer and singer had to oblige. Bellini was acutely aware of the public's desires and worked accordingly to meet their needs. Not only contractually required to be present during rehearsals and performances, he worked to submit the exact intention of his music by carefully working with the librettist, picking out the talent of his cast, and capitalizing on their talents.[13] Because Pasta and others such as Grisi and Malibran existed, Bellini was able to create mad scenes that suited the public's growing desire for verisimilitude and realism. This was a remarkable point in early romanticism.

Not surprisingly, these mad scenes were fertile fodder for singers to express their full vocal and acting range. The musical and theatrical qualities of mad scenes demand it. Even in the 20th century, singers have achieved special critical commentary for their portrayals of madness. From Maria Callas to

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[11] Rutherford, 113.

[12] Ibid., 119.

[13] Carlotta Sorba,"To Please the Public: Composers and Audiences in Nineteenth-Century Italy," *The Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 36, no. 4 (2006): 595-614, http://www.jstor.org.proxyiub.uits.iu.edu/stable/3656346.

Renee Fleming, beyond vocal skill, it is their theatrical acting traits that seem to reach the audience's milieu with an indelible mark.

Chapter 3: Audience Perspectives

For me, this is where things get interesting. What makes madness comical verses sympathetic? Does it matter? If qualities of musical writings are remaining largely the same as they always have been, and if famous singers' performances are similar enough to garnish critical accolades specifically for their immediate sensation of realness, then what, if anything, has changed over the history of scenes depicting the mad? The audience. An audience provides a snapshot of societal temperament through their reception of any given theatrical performance. And, indeed, any theatrical performance has a high probability of purposefully provoking critics and societal thinking or at the very least reflecting popular thoughts.

At this point, I'd like to draw attention to four musical examples. All of them use compositional qualities that evoke madness (refer to section under heading "Stylistic Qualities"), and all of them have been portrayed by famously notable singers who were renowned for theatrical and vocal flair. But here, with audience perception thrown into the mix of composer intention and performer projection, we can time-stamp the idea of madness and compare differences. What did contemporary audiences think of Amina in Bellini's *La Sonnambula*? What did they think of Ophelia in Berlioz's *La mort d'Ophélie*? What did they think of Violetta in Verdi's *La Traviata*? What did they think of Blanche Dubois in Previn's *A Streetcar Named Desire*? To start with the basics, I'll look at what the composer and librettist wrote. What feelings might they have had regarding madness? And how did they depict that through their writing?

In *La Sonnambula*, Amina is a sweet and pure orphan adopted by the kind mill proprietress Teresa. Amina is betrothed to a handsome young man, Elvino, but when Count Rodolfo comes to town, trouble begins to brew. Lisa, the inn proprietress, is jealous of Elvino's choice to marry Amina. Meanwhile, Count Rodolfo's attentions to Amina make Elvino jealous. Everyone concludes their evening before the ghost of the village appears. When Rodolfo is in his room, Lisa, arrives to tell him that the villagers have become aware that he's the count of the castle and will be coming to welcome him. A

strange noise is heard and suddenly Amina walks through his window. Lisa hides, dropping her handkerchief behind her. The count realizes that Amina is the ghost of the village and simply suffers somnambulism, or sleep-walking. He leaves so as not to embarrass her if she wakes up. As villagers arrive to welcome the Count, they find instead, Amina. She awakes in confusion. Elvino is furious and calls off the marriage. Later, he is persuaded by Lisa to marry her instead, even though the Count and Amina have explained Amina's innocence. Again, the Count attempts to intervene on Amina's behalf, and with remarkable timeliness, Amina appears on a rickety plank above the mill in a state of sleep-walking. The count warns not to wake her, lest she fall to her death. Amina sings of her grief of losing Elvino, and by the time she crosses the wooden plank, Elvino is there to embrace her in full forgiveness. She awakes to the celebration of the village and lives happily ever after.

The mad scene begins the moment she sings "Ah! non credea mirarti" as she sleepwalks across the unstable and dangerously high wooden plank. Struck with grief and displaced from reality in a dream state, she is doing the unthinkable. In the following examples, I will point out how the text and music work together to convey Amina's loss of sensibility. "The relationship between the stage and the real world was a mutual exchange. The action of melodrama sometimes transferred its energy to the public, and sometimes the heroic transfiguration of real life into opera inverted to become a heroic melodramaticization of the real."[14] In this way, composers, librettists and singers aligned music and natural gesture that drew in audiences who could empathetically transfer the drama of the stage to their own emotional lives.

In the following examples, Amina sings that she is in disbelief that Elvino's love for her has extinguished so quickly, like flowers. She continues to say her tears may bring new life to the wilted flowers, but they will not revive Elvino's lost love for her. By the end of her sleepwalking aria, Elvino embraces her and she awakes to find the happiness she had always wished for in his love. The town celebrates the reunion of the happy couple and she sings of her contentment and amazement that she has

[14] Sorba, 614.

regained her lover's affection. She asks him to embrace her and unite in a single hope to live on earth as in a heaven of love together. (See examples 1.5 through 1.10.)

We cannot discuss Italian composers such as Rossini, Bellini, Donizetti, and Verdi without acknowledging how the history of their native country influenced their works. Post-Napoleonic Italy begins with the Congress of Vienna (1814-15) and concludes with Victor Emmanuel as King of Italy in 1861 along with the wresting of Rome from the papacy occurring a decade later in 1871 when it was officially declared Italy's capital. But the process of *risorgimento* created an inescapably tumultuous political background that saw revolts (1820-21), and three wars for independence (1848-49, 1859, and 1866). Austrian occupation throughout this time meant heavy censorship.[15]

"Unlike in France, Britain, and the United States at this time, clubs, associations, libraries, and museums barely existed"[16] which made private salons and theater that much more important. And they were everywhere. Not surprisingly, opera houses, with their extravagance and splendor were places for the nobility to be seen. Largely set in place as figureheads by Austrian power, the aristocrats paradoxically found connection to their people through nationalism which could best be publicly displayed in a unified appreciation for opera.

> The theater was also the principal locus for the limited number of other cultural activities that were permitted. Before the 1830s, scarcely any written periodicals appeared in Naples (or in the other Italian states), although their numbers began slowly to increase, albeit under the increasingly vigilant eyes of the censors. Since few other topics could be discussed in print, theater reviews took up a disproportionately large amount of space in these publications.[17]

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[15] John A. Davis, "Opera and Absolutism in Restoration Italy, 1815-1860," *The Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 36, no. 4 (2006): 569-94, http://www.jstor.org.proxyiub.uits.iu.edu/stable/3656345. "In 1855, for example, censors retitled Verdi's Traviata (1853) as Violetta and Rigoletto (1851) as Lionello before the San Carlo," 592.

[16] Ibid., 581.

This explains why composers were closely tied to their audiences. Success was not based on critical merit proffered by the erudite elite alone. Rather, the audience, or public, became a key factor of consideration in their approval or dismissal of theatrical and operatic works so that critics wrote on behalf of popular opinion as a natural consequence of ever-growing popularization of nationalistic tendencies.[18]

The subject matter that interested the public, and therefore the composers, was couched neatly in the romantic melodrama that reflected larger contemporary allusions to Italy's oppressed state. Given the circumstances, the *bel canto* mad scene was primed to flourish.

Within the context of suppressed political freedom, Italian librettists and composers developed ideas borrowed from French philosophical legacies that "would emphasize…Diderot's and Rousseau's aspiration toward a "natural" form of communication, which became a staple of the dramaturgy of [French] *melodrame,* was connected to the search for *Rousseauvian* "natural" spaces, evident in the geographical setting of many representatives of the genre."[19] Thus, the creation of *semi-seria* operas set in the Alps---with all the associations of purity, whiteness, freshness, that would transfer to the heroic virgin---was born. What is pure must be kept from defilement, and this theme resonated with the public who felt their beloved Italy was constantly being encroached upon by foreign control. Specifically, the mad scene was set as the locus of conflict.

Perhaps, no one exemplifies the ideal Virgin Alpine tragedy with a happy ending better than Vincenzo Bellini in his *semi-seria* opera *La Sonnambula* (1831). In large part, he owes his success to his

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[17] Davis, 582.

[18] Carlotta Sorba, "To Please the Public: Composers and Audiences in Nineteenth-Century Italy," *The Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 36, no. 4 (2006): 595-614, http://www.jstor.org.proxyiub.uits.iu.edu/stable/3656346. "The public made its feelings known to composers not just through boos or cheers but also through formal petitions," 602. Her point is supported by the following letter written to Rossini by Ferdinando Paër, a Paris Opera administrator: "The public strongly asks that the music played by the stage band in *La donna del lago* be suppressed, and the newspapers have been faithful interpreters of this general desire."' Letter of the Opera Administration to Ferdinando Paer, September 21, 1824, in Rossini, Lettere e documenti, II, 275, 602.

[19] Emanuele Senici, "Verdi's Luisa, a Semiserious Alpine Virgin," *19th-Century Music* 22, no. 2 (1998): 144-68, doi:10.2307/746855, 152.

demanding *prima donnas* who would take as much as they gave, necessitating more emphasis on legitimizing the opera score to the composer's expressed intellectual property.

This was quite a contrast to the prior neo-classical era. Also, this development of acting style is directly correlated to the tastes of the pubic which the composer and singer had to oblige. Bellini was acutely aware of the public's desires and worked accordingly to meet their needs. Not only contractually required to be present during rehearsals and performances, he worked to submit the exact intention of his music by carefully working with the librettist, picking out the talent of his cast, and capitalizing on their talents.[20]

But madness in the romantic era could be represented in more tragic ways. What can we glean from poor mad Ophelia? Shakespeare's tragic waif is given a glamorized—fantasized--- makeover in Hector Berlioz's art song *La Mort d'Ophélie* (1842), set to a ballade by Ernest Legouvé (1807-1903) based on Gertrude's description of Ophelia's drowning in Act IV of *Hamlet* (Act IV, scene ii, lines 166-83). Berlioz was especially fond of *Hamlet* and considered writing it as an opera. He was also infatuated with Harriet Smithson, the Shakespearian actress known for her realistic portrayals of the tragic heroine in roles such as Ophelia and Juliet. After merely seeing her onstage as Ophelia (performing in English, a language he did not understand), Berlioz obsessively pursued her with letters and attention. He even wrote his *Symphonie fantastique* as cathartic response to his unrequited interest in her. A couple of years after the premier, she heard the symphony and at last took up an interest in Berlioz. She became his first wife but the relationship ended unhappily. Clearly, the relationship was memorable and impactful. But perhaps another reason he wrote this piece is because the poet and dramatist, Legouvé, had once loaned 2,000 francs to Berlioz so that he could finish his opera *Benvenuto Cellini*.[21] Still, it's easy to see where

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[20] Carlotta Sorba,"To Please the Public: Composers and Audiences in Nineteenth-Century Italy," *The Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 36, no. 4 (2006): 595-614, http://www.jstor.org.proxyiub.uits.iu.edu/stable/3656346.

[21] Hector Berlioz, *Score, Urtext of the New Berlioz edition*, ed. Ian Rumbold, vol. 2, 2 vols. (London: Bärenreiter, 2006), V, 29-35.

Berlioz might be inspired by his first wife who reformed acting techniques with her realistic portrayals and was of personal importance to him.[22]

Berlioz, being a masterful orchestrator, understood the romantic subtlety of nuance. Like his muse, he employed techniques of specificity to shape dramatic effects. His markings are specific; andantino con moto quasi allegretto, sempre a mezza voce, ppp, una corda, crescendo, sf, smorzando, dolcissimo, perdendo, poco ritenuto. His composition is thoughtfully constructed.

In the play, Gertrude describes Ophelia's death, but Legouvé loosely translates and *adapts* the scene with more sympathy, an important romanticizing marker--glamorizing--the tragedy of madness. For instance, Shakespeare's original text:

There with fantastic garlands did she come

Of crow-flowers, nettles, daisies, and long purples

That liberal shepherds give a grosser name,

But our cold maids do dead men's fingers call them.[23]

Legouvé *instead* says, in her sweet and tender madness [she gathered] periwinkles, gold buttons, opal colored irises, and some of the pale pink flowers called fingers of the dead.

Dans sa douce et tendre folie,

Des pervenches, des boutons d'or,

Des iris aux couleurs d'opale,

Et de ces fleurs d'un rose pale

Qu'on appelle des doigts de mort.[24]

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[22] Melinda O'Neal, *Experiencing Berlioz: A Listener's Companion.* Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2018.

[23] William Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, Act IV scene 2.

[24] Ernest Legouvé, after William Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, Act IV, scene 2.

Furthermore, Legouvé says, soon in the deep abyss the poor insane girl was dragged down. Leaving her melodious song scarcely begun. Berlioz adds a tune on "ah" afterward.

Bientôt dans l'abîme profound
Entraîna la pauvre insensée,
Laissant à peine commence
Sa mélodieuse chanson.

In contrast, Shakespeare's tone is less sympathetic. The girl was mad and as Gertrude and everyone else knew, she was beyond help anyway.

Unto that element: but long it could not be
Till that her garments, heavy with their drink,
Pull'd the poor wretch from her melodious lay
To muddy death.

The music re-enforces the romanticized version, creating Ophélie as a mesmerizing erotic young woman whose weakness of mind and frailty of corporal awareness is seen as charming. She is constrained to repetitive strophic material with carefully rounded melodic shapes entrapped within the confines of slow harmonic motion and repeated oscillations. Having no voice of her own, Berlioz supplies her with an ethereal ahhhhh which neatly forms her into a beautiful object of fascination. He subjugates any true empathy in favor of sympathetic enjoyment of her objectified beauty, thereby muting the stylistic qualities of madness to an obedient and more appealing temperament. (See examples 1.11-1.13 *La mort d'Ophélie.*)

While Berlioz's depiction of a mad scene is removed from first person into third person narrative, it is no less effective in describing madness. As we saw from Bellini, and now Berlioz, madness can be romanticized, and Berlioz's use of third person neatly objectifies the image of madness, firmly securing it into the realm of art that Diderot, an unapologetic sentimentalist, probably would have enjoyed.

Verdi takes on yet another perspective of madness. *La traviata*, which premiered in 1853 at La Fenice opera house in Venice, features Violetta, a beloved tuberculosis-ridden courtesan who struggles to

achieve true love. Only when she selflessly sacrifices her desire to be with Alfredo for what is intended to be for the preservation of Alfredo's family honor (according to Alfredo's father), does she set in motion the circumstances of sublime love, as realized almost too late by all as she lies on her deathbed. The subject matter was intentionally set with realism. In fact, the story is based on a real-life courtesan, Marie Duplessis (1824-1847), once a lover of the playwright, Alexandre Dumas the younger. The opera has three acts with a libretto by Francesco Maria Piave. It is based on *La Dame aux Camélias* (1852), a play adapted from the novel by Alexandre Dumas the younger.

I choose to include Violetta's famous scene because it takes the audience a step closer to madness: classism was a reality in everyday life that effected constrictions on life-changing events. In his *Studio sulle opere di Giuseppe Verdi (1859)*, Abramo Basevi offered an interesting gloss on this: "Verdi was the only one in Italy to treat seriously [seriamente] the emotions of characters of our modern and prosaic society, as in *La traviata*. La sonnambula, Linda etc. are similar subjects, but not prosaic."[25]

Violetta represents the 'other'. A beloved outcast, she struggles to define her place in society and to be her goodly authentic self in spite of societal expectations. She drives herself to madness with emotional reasoning that defies the expectation for a woman tied to her lower-class existence. She fatally strives for the impossible. In the following scene at the end of Act I, Violetta struggles between melancholy and mania, as she attempts to decipher the previously unfathomable possibility—the mad possibility—that she could love and be loved in return. (See examples 1.14-1.16, *La Traviata.*)

As the modern era supplanted the romantic one, madness was organized into a framework of institutionalization. 'Otherness' was increasingly regarded as an illness that could be improved with the right treatments and care or hidden away from the normal world. Still, from the time of Enlightenment---which abandoned edicts that heavily tinted madness as a moral character flaw--- to modern views hundreds of years later, progress has been very slow. Even as demonstrated in the romantic era, madness

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[25] Emanuele Senici, "Verdi's Luisa, a Semiserious Alpine Virgin," *19th-Century Music* 22, no. 2 (1998): 144-68, doi:10.2307/746855, 155.

was still viewed as a character flaw, albeit through no fault of the character herself. (Amina could not help being a sleepwalker, Berlioz's Ophélie was a victim of circumstance, Violetta was a victim of classism.) This was nominal progress in the perception of madness. Likewise, within the current fashion of institutionalization, there is still much left to be desired. Now, as throughout history, institutionalization can often mean subjection to abuse and neglect that is a far cry from the often well-intentioned 'asylum'. Meanwhile, the musical mad scene continues to reflect treatment of mental illness within this framework.

In popular culture, Bedlam is synonymous with Bethlem hospital which was founded in 1247, England. Bethlem's long history points out a very big issue in contemporary concern for the mentally ill. Specifically, it is a reminder that mental illness continues to evade full understanding despite sincere and progressive attempts to do so. Even as far back as the early 18th century, the institution was recognized for having severe problematic issues. *A Rake's Progress*, is a series of eight paintings (later published as engravings) depicting the life of fictional Tom Rakewell (1735). It was William Hogarth's exposé of the cruelty, depravity and hypocrisy which he saw in London society, as well as a morality play in which evil finally comes down on the head of the evildoer.[26] And it was this series that inspired Igor Stravinsky's opera *The Rake's Progress* (1951), with a libretto by W. H. Auden and Chester Kallman.

Stravinsky used a pastiche of earlier musical forms for this neo-classical moralistic tale. By doing so, he amplified the constraints of the institutional asylum and the limited progress toward the mentally ill as seen in hindsight from a modern 20th century lens. "The overt display of precedents has been deplored as reactionary, but it issues from what Auden identified, in an essay on Yeats, as the central 'modern problem': that of being 'no longer supported by tradition without being aware of it'. It is the forced

[26] "Mania and Melancholia at Bethlem HospitalArchive," *Bethlem Museum of the Mind* (web log), December 23, 2014, accessed March 1, 2018, http://museumofthemind.org.uk/blog/post/a-rakes-progress-viii.

awareness, not the traditionalism as such, that has grated."[27] Appropriately, this mirrors the 'modern problem' of madness as well.

Figure 1.2. *A Rake's Progress*, VIII, "In the madhouse", Engraving, 1763

But just like madness is depicted with various perspectives in other eras, so too, is the case in the modern mad scene. *A Streetcar Named Desire* (1995), is an opera composed by André Previn with a libretto by Philip Littell based on the play by Tennessee Williams. The protagonist, Blanche DuBois spirals into madness and completes her fate, and the opera, by being taken away to an insane asylum. With three acts, the synopsis is as follows: After losing her job and her home, Blanche goes to New Orleans to live with her sister and brother-in-law, Stella and Stanley Kowalski. Blanche endeavors to display a glamorous southern gentility and sexually suggestive manner that irritates Stanley. Out of spite, Stanley seeks to expose Blanche's past against her. That evening, at a poker game held at the apartment, Stanley gets drunk and hits Stella. Blanche advises Stella to leave Stanley to no avail, and Blanche also

[27] Richard Taruskin,"Rake's Progress, The," *Grove Music Online.* 28 Feb. 2018, http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com.proxyiub.uits.iu.edu/grovemusic/view/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.001.0001/omo-9781561592630-e-5000904281..

finds a new love interest in Stanley's friend, Mitch. These actions incite more anger and hatred in Stanley. Act two starts some weeks later with Stella (now pregnant) and Stanley out for the evening. Blanche, home alone, makes a pathetic pass at the paper boy and later goes out on a date with Mitch. The two share intimate stories including Blanche's disclosure that she was once married to a homosexual man and she feels the need to blame herself for his suicide. Act three starts some weeks later during Blanche's birthday. Mitch is late, and it turns out that Stanley informed him of the dirt he dug up on Blanche, so their relationship has ended. The incriminating information is that Blanche was asked to leave her hometown due to her promiscuity and her seduction of young men. Stanley gives Blanche a one-way ticket home. Later that night, Stella is taken to the hospital for premature delivery. Mitch shows up at the apartment drunk and confronts Blanche. He denounces her character and she begins to become unhinged. Later, Stanley rapes Blanche. Some days after that, Stella packs Blanche's clothes for her while waiting for the doctor to arrive. Stella cannot believe Blanche's accusation that Stanley raped her. Blanche is unaware that she will be sent to an insane asylum. Instead, she believes that she's preparing to visit a fictitious old admirer. [28]

It is in Act III, scene 2 that the audience begins to question Blanche's sanity. Furthermore, there's an uncomfortable line between Blanche's use of delusion as a coping mechanism and the possibility that she's simply mentally ill. Both options are tragic, and the cumulative effects of her futile attempts to restore herself leave an ever-widening displacement gap between herself and reality. In the aria "I want magic!", Blanche confesses her insecurities to Mitch, but her earnestness in maintaining a delusional image of herself calls into question her mental stability. Her final aria, "I can smell the sea air", leaves no doubt of her disconnection to reality, and her fate is sealed in the famous last line, "Whoever you are, I've always relied on the kindness of strangers". (See examples 1.17-1.20.) Previn's music for Blanche is lush, warm, and nostalgic. This makes her inevitable institutionalization---something that we

[28] Andre Previn and Philip Littell, "A Streetcar Named Desire," LA Opera | A Streetcar Named Desire, 2014, accessed March 01, 2018, https://www.laopera.org/season/13-14Season-at-a-Glance/Streetcar1314/.

often hear represented mechanically, coldly---all the more tragic. She doesn't fit into the real world described, but it is just as difficult to imagine her fitting into an institution. She is truly lost to the world.

Conclusion

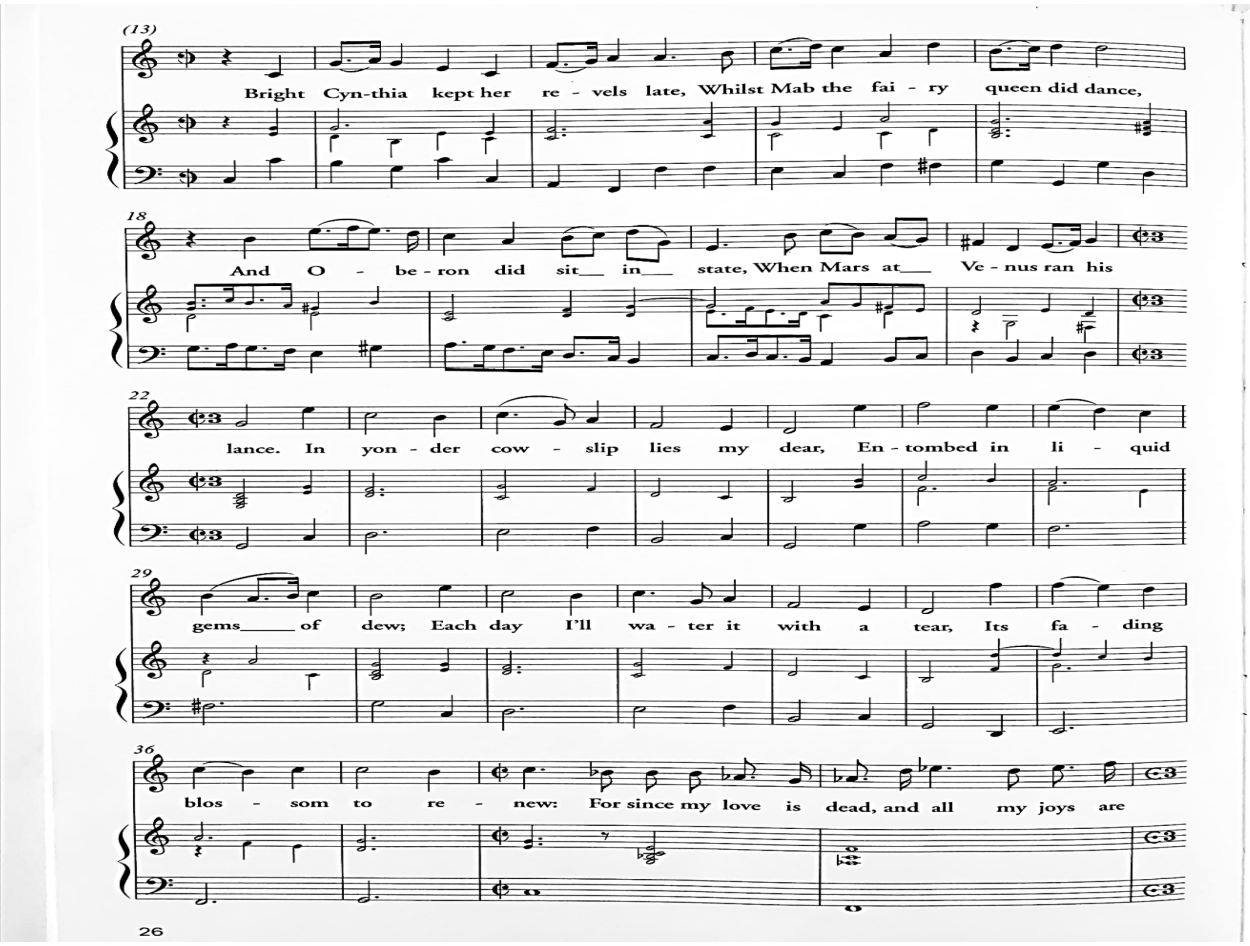
The mad scene in music is a marker of societal perceptions. How madness is perceived, displayed and attended to incites an emotional response toward the real-life mad that in turn develops action. Within the last 350 years, depictions of madness in vocal music have been transformed from comedic fodder and moralistic tales of warning, to romanticized glorification of suffering and modern institutional care that grapples with understanding the alienated depths that only the afflicted can know. Through music, mad scenes give a means of communication by proxy for those who cannot connect coherently with society. In the mad scene, we see the extremes of mania and melancholy portrayed by pitch, rhythm, text, gesture, and harmony. These works captivate our ears, eyes and thoughts with sympathetic recognition that human existence can be frighteningly fragile. It is the modern hope that society responds with tolerance and patience as we bridge the gap between understanding and treating the mad. Meanwhile, music mad scenes will continue to mirror and describe the progress of the mad state in society.

Figure 1.1. Raving and Melancholy Madness, Engraving by C. Grignion after S. Wale after C. Cibber

Appendix : Collected Musical Examples

This section discusses specific musical features and details through which the composer and poet/librettist illustrates madness and evokes either sympathy or dirision in the audience. Beginning with Example 1.1 and ending with Example 1.20, these are shown in order of appearance as they have been presented in the paper.

BESS OF BEDLAM, PURCELL

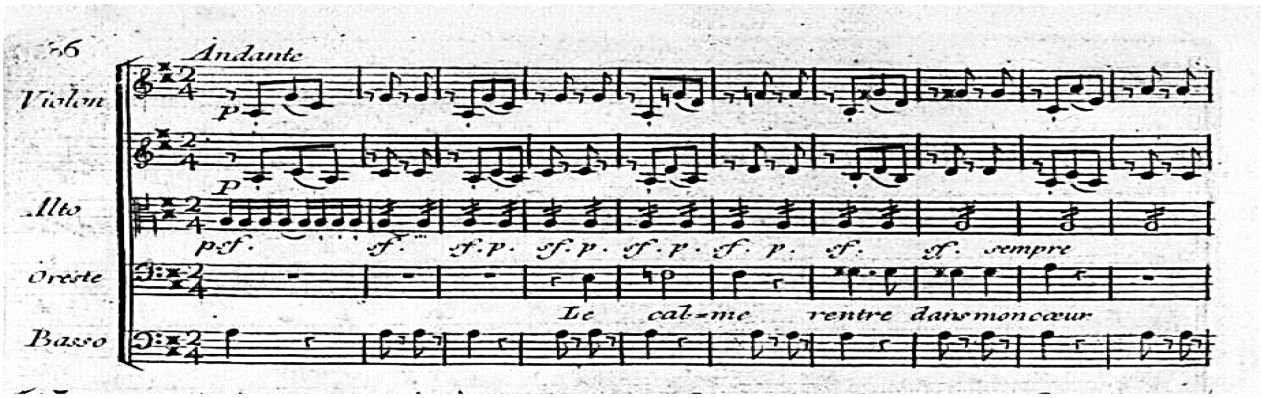


Example 1.1. From silent shades and the Elizium groves, Bess of Bedlam.

In this edition, time signatures adhere to the original score to differentiate tempo markings more clearly. There are 4 time signatures used in total for this piece. 𝄵 refers to a moderate crotchet beat, 𝅝 is equivalent to the 18th-century *alla breve*, indicating a minim beat, and 𝄵3 is a triple time a bit slower than the triple time indicated by 𝄴3.[29]

> [It] is constructed from fairly short sections in nearly all the styles available to Purcell at the time: secco recitative, arioso and lyrical movements in both duple and triple time. The five fast triple-time sections, all rather similar, provide a unified framework to contain increasingly violent contrasts. This basic unity is strengthened by fleeting references back to the tempos of the two opening movements towards the end of the piece. The main harmonic interest lies in the juxtaposition of major and minor 3rds but apart from some touches of tonic and subdominant minor the actual range of modulation is very limited. The constant reiteration of tonic and the rhythmic restriction of the triple time passages serve to portray the manic obsessiveness which underlies Bess's superficial, abrupt changes of mood.

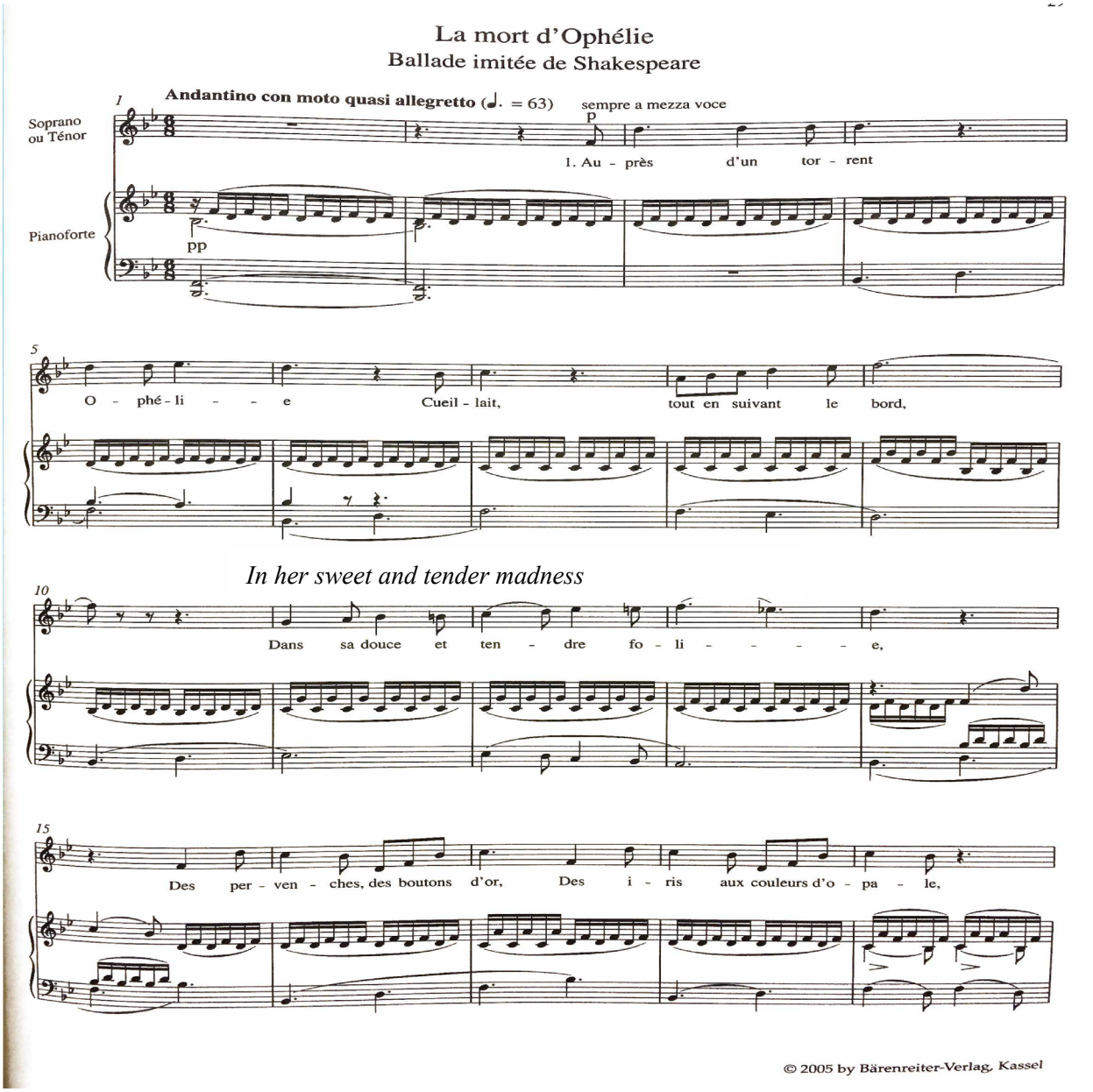
[29]Eccles, John, Godfrey Finger, Daniel Purcell, Henry Purcell, John Blow, and John Weldon. *Thirteen Mad Songs.* Edited by Timothy Roberts. High voice (original key) London: Voicebox, 1999.



Example 1.2. *Iphigénie en Tauride*, Act II, scene 3, Air: Le calme rentre dans mon coeur.

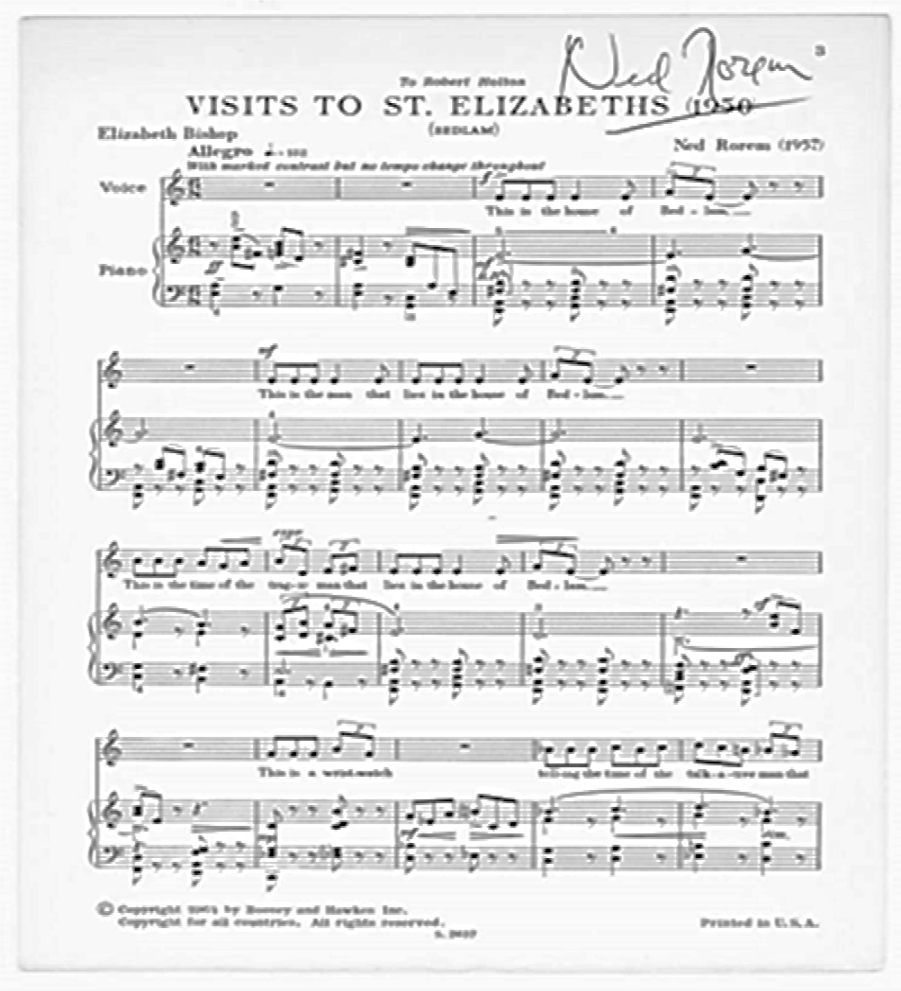
Orestes, left alone after Pylades has been arrested by the temple guards, falls into a half stupor; in pitiable self-delusion he tries to encourage the feeling of peace that descends on him momentarily, singing *Le calme rentre dans mon cœur*. But the accompaniment, with a subdued, agitated, sixteenth-note reiteration of one tone, and with a sforzando accent at the first beat of every measure, betrays the troubled state of his mind, from which he cannot banish the pangs of remorse for his past crime. It is perhaps the first occurrence in opera of this device of using the orchestra to reveal the inward truth of a situation, in distinction from, even in contradiction to, the words of the text - a practice that Wagner was later to incorporate into a complete system.[30]

[30] Donald Jay Grout, and Hermine Weigel Williams, *A Short History of Opera,* 4th ed. (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003), 268.



Example 1.3. La mort d'Ophélie.

Berlioz sets up a pattern in the accompaniment, this one ripples and shimmers in oscillating intervals. Is this a pattern to represent Ophelia's trance-like state of delusion? Is it a depiction of an obsessive state, of dissociation or madness? Or, is it merely the water? The chromaticism in mm.11-12 stretches upward to "folie" before settling down to a comfortable tonic resolution.



Example 1.4. Visit to St. Elizabeths (1950).[31]

Visits to St. Elizabeths[32]

[31] Elizabeth And Ned Rorem. Bishop, "Visits to St. Elizabeths 1950 Bedlam. For Medium Voice and Piano. Music by Ned Rorem. Text by Elizabeth Bishop by Elizabeth Bishop, Ned ROREM on James Cummins Bookseller," James Cummins Bookseller, accessed March 01, 2018, https://www.jamescumminsbookseller.com/pages/books/260682/elizabeth-bishop-ned-rorem/visits-to-st-elizabeths-1950-bedlam-for-medium-voice-and-piano-music-by-ned-rorem-text-by-elizabeth.

[32] Bishop, Elizabeth, *The Complete Poems, 1927-1979.* New York: Farrar Straus Giroux, 1983.

This is the house of Bedlam.

This is the man
that lies in the house of Bedlam.

This is the time
of the tragic man
that lies in the house of Bedlam.

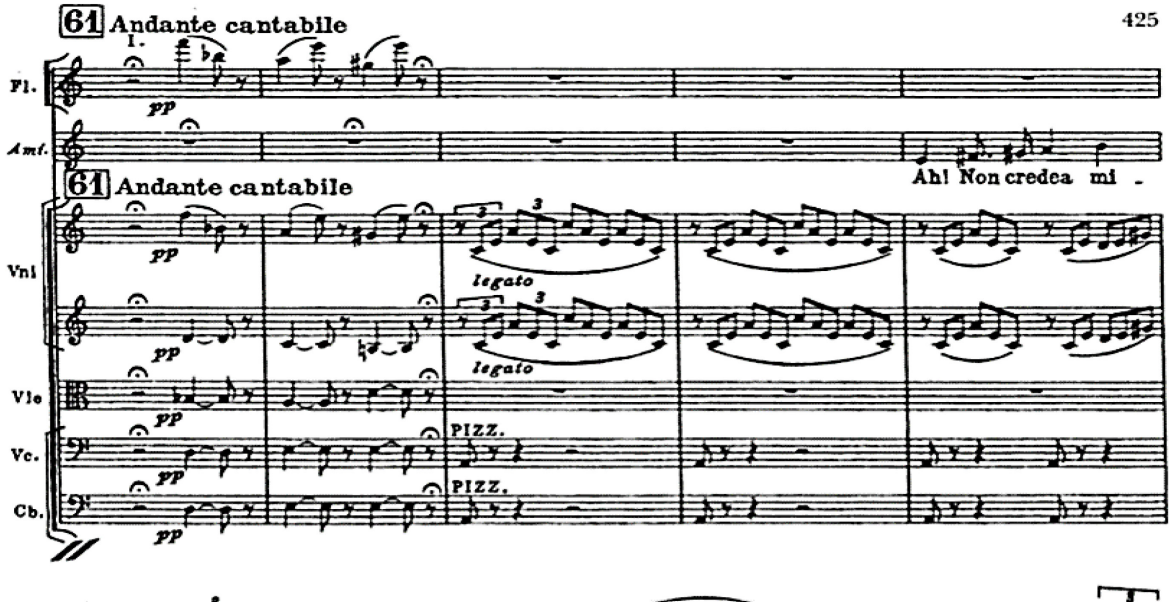
[Elizabeth Bishop's poem continues to build with each stanza having one additional line until twelve lines form the ending stanza. It is an additive poem based on the nursery rhyme "This is the House that Jack Built", but it does not adhere strictly to the additive form. Rather, Bishop subtly alters her additive lines with new or expanded images. The effect is chaotic, and the song's tempo is frantic while including moments contrasted by imploring legato.]

This is the soldier home from the war.
These are the years and the walls and the door
that shut on a boy that pats the floor
to see if the world is round or flat.
This is a Jew in a newspaper hat
that dances carefully down the ward,
walking the plank of a coffin board
with the crazy sailor
that shows his watch
that tells the time
of the wretched man

that lies in the house of Bedlam.

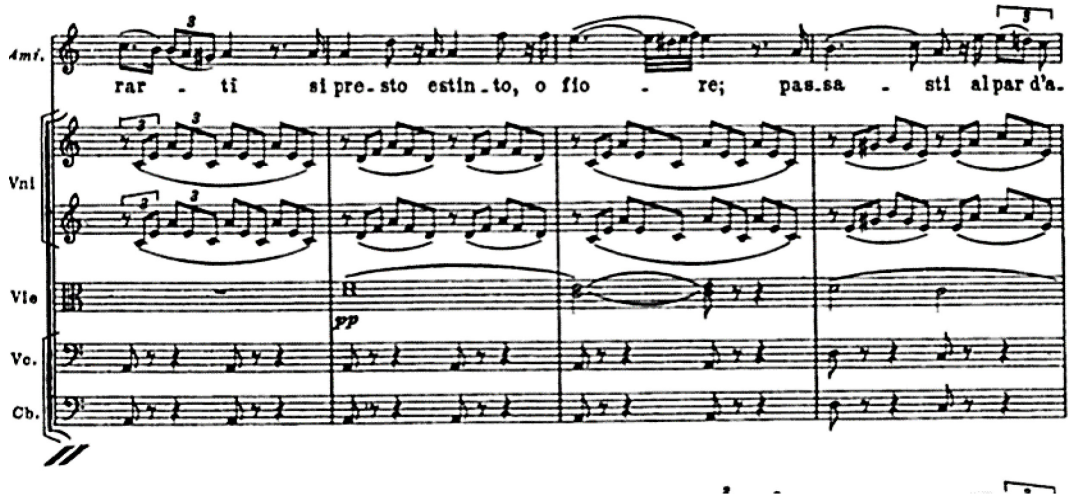
Notice the rocking 6/8 rhythm and the duple rhythm that juxtaposes uneasily in the accented vocal line along with repetitious notes. The melody spins more broadly in range and begins to contrast wearily legato lines starting in stanza 7 of the poem. By the 12th stanza, the melody has explored the contrast between legato and staccato, between repeated notes and wider spun leaps, between syllabic declamation and melismatic delivery. The tempo and the time signature remain unrelentingly constant with incessant piano plowing along mechanically. It is a modern madness for the machine age.

LA SONNAMBULA, BELLINI



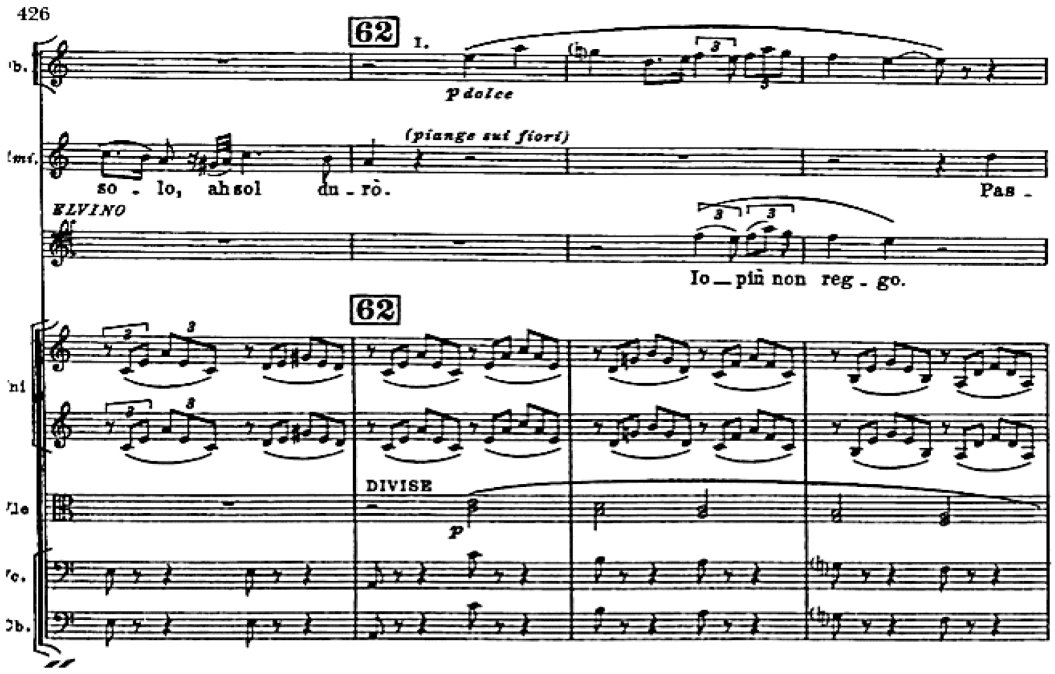
Example 1.5. *La Sonnambula*. Act II, scene 2, Aria: Ah! Non credea mirarti…

A suspenseful mood is set as the orchestra pairs down to soft pizzicato timed like walking footsteps in the andante cantabile tempo. The violins and violas repeat triplets obsessively, suspenseful, with dreamlike entrancement, and then Amina begins to sing…



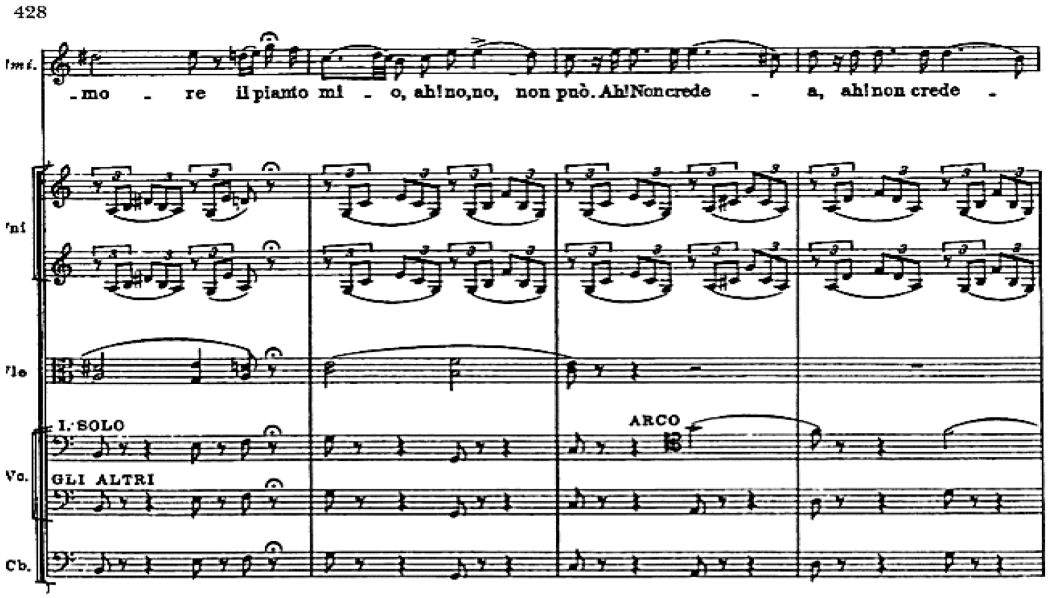
Example 1.6. *La Sonnambula*. Act II, scene 2, Aria: Ah! Non credea mirarti…

Notice how "sì presto and estinto" leap upward, first a fourth, then a sixth, to unstressed syllables. Along with the brief rest, the effect could be interpreted not only by text painting "quick extinguishing" as a questioning inflection, but also, a psychological questioning in the upward inflection as Amina subconsciously processes her grief in her sleepwalking state. She then clings to the dotted quarter note on "fiore" before relinquishing to a delicate turning of the word/image that, like her love, escapes her hold.



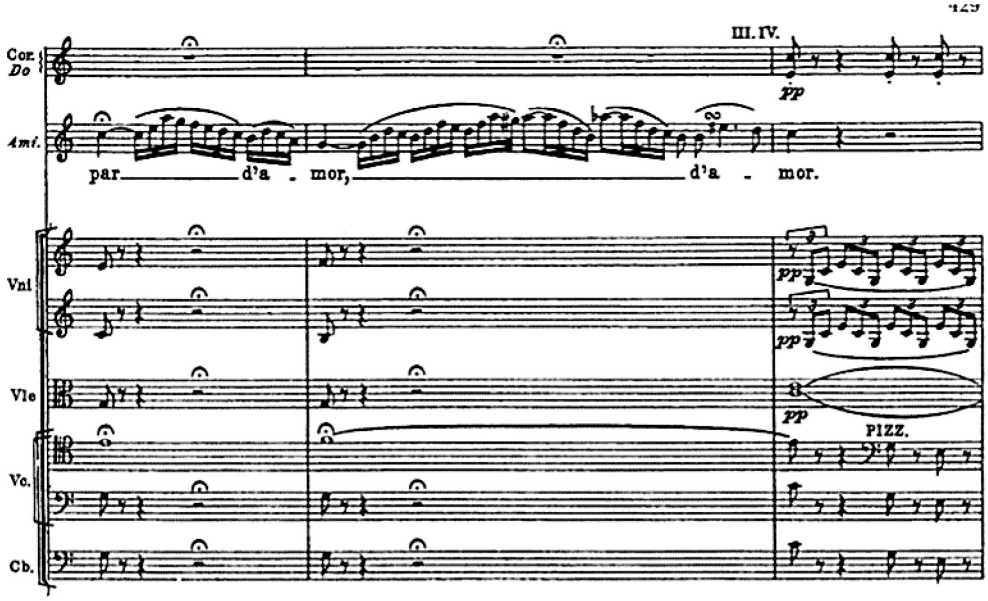
Example 1.7. *La Sonnambula*. Act II, scene 2, Aria: Ah! Non credea mirarti…

Here, in the midst of Amina's sleepwalking aria, a soft sweet instrumental solo recalls her innocence with wistful dotted rhythm and triplets reminiscent of the cheerful skipping seen in the opening and ending of the opera. But it's not Amina's voice which sings the line, for she cannot. She has lost her innocence through Elvino's condemnation.



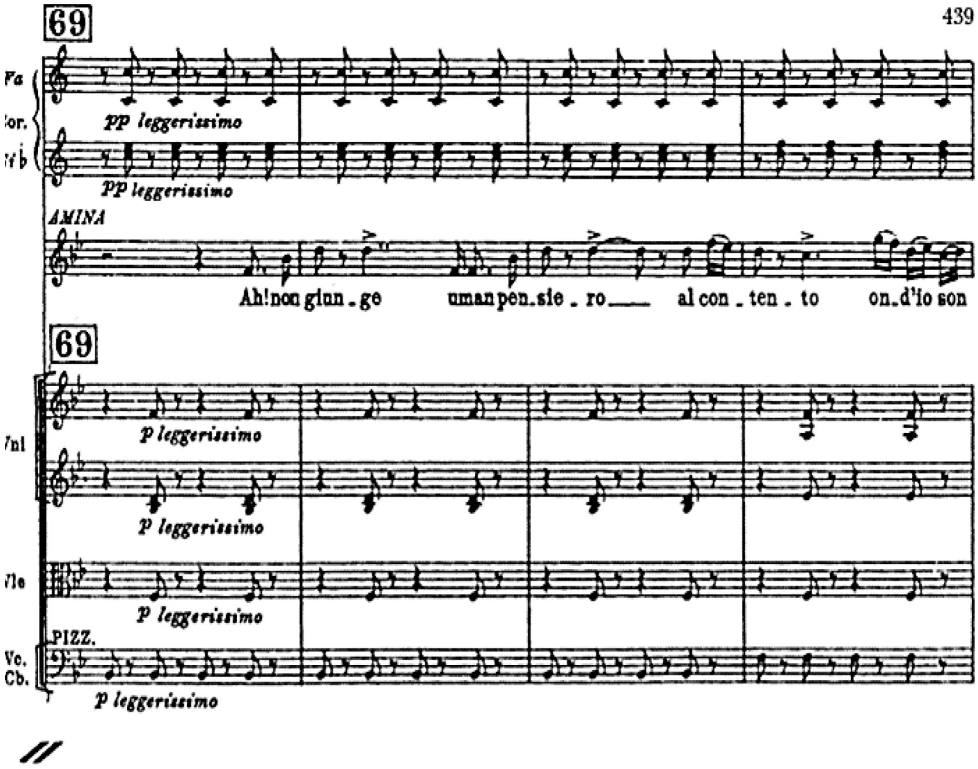
Example 1.8. *La Sonnambula*. Act II, scene 2, Aria: Ah! Non credea mirarti…

The last two measures in Example 1.8 weep downward in disillusioned resignation despite the Amina's attempt to hold on with repeated pitches.



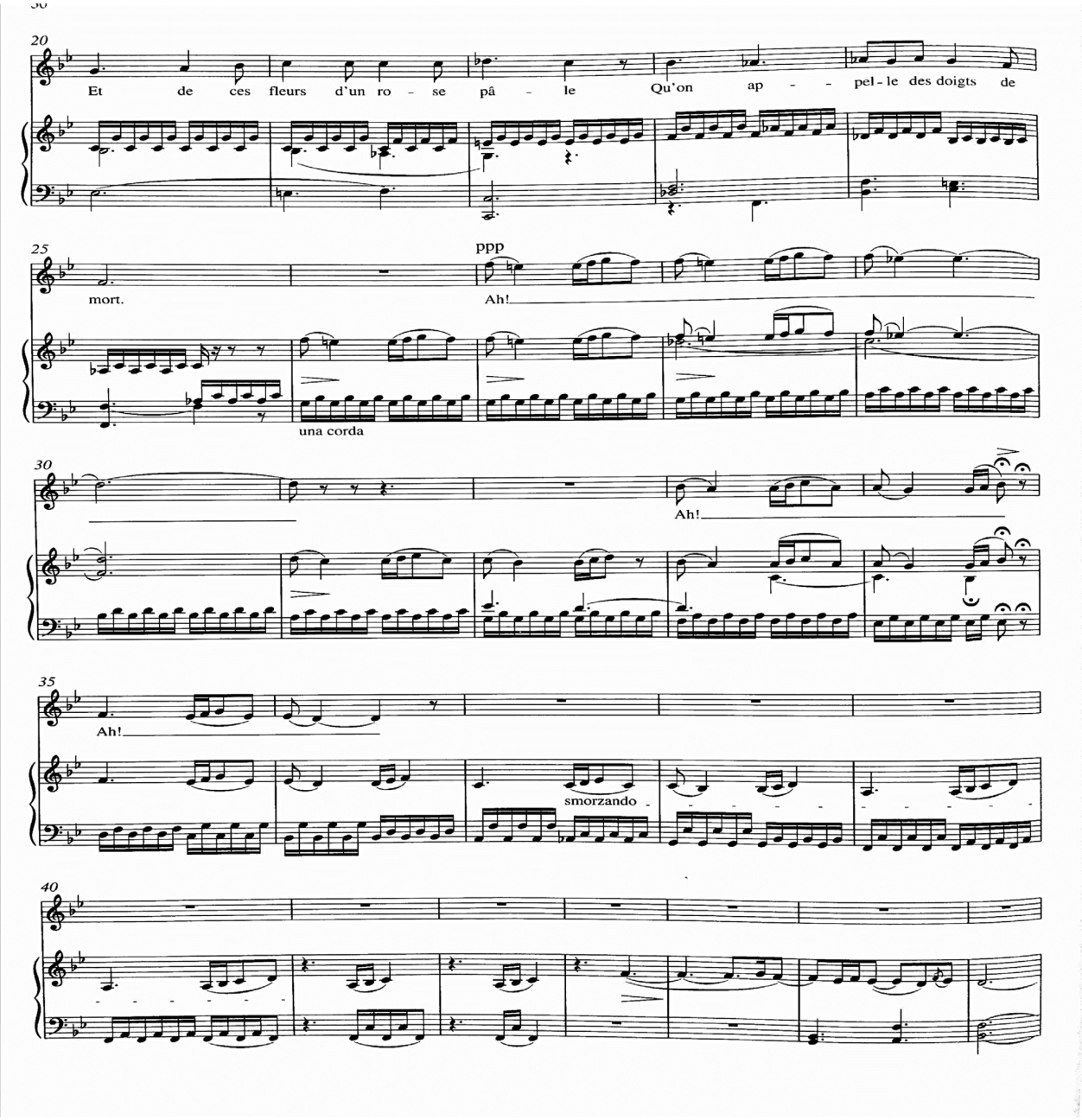
Example 1.9. *La Sonnambula*. Act II, scene 2, Aria: Ah! Non credea mirarti…

Her cadenza spirals upward on an arpeggiated frame to a climatic top note that carries the potential to release more heavenly still, perhaps in sublime determination to overcome her loss, perhaps triumphantly for surviving the ordeal of sleepwalking dangerously high on a rickety plank. However, instead, the last bit of phrase is repeated with a flat 6th of doubt which then turns still in disillusionment on the word "amor" for the cadence. Of course, at this point, Elvino can't help but to accept her fragile charm and the whole village rejoices at the reuniting of the couple. Amina is ecstatic to wake up to this happy turn of events. The mood drastically changes as she sings her final cabaletta, "Ah! Non giunge".



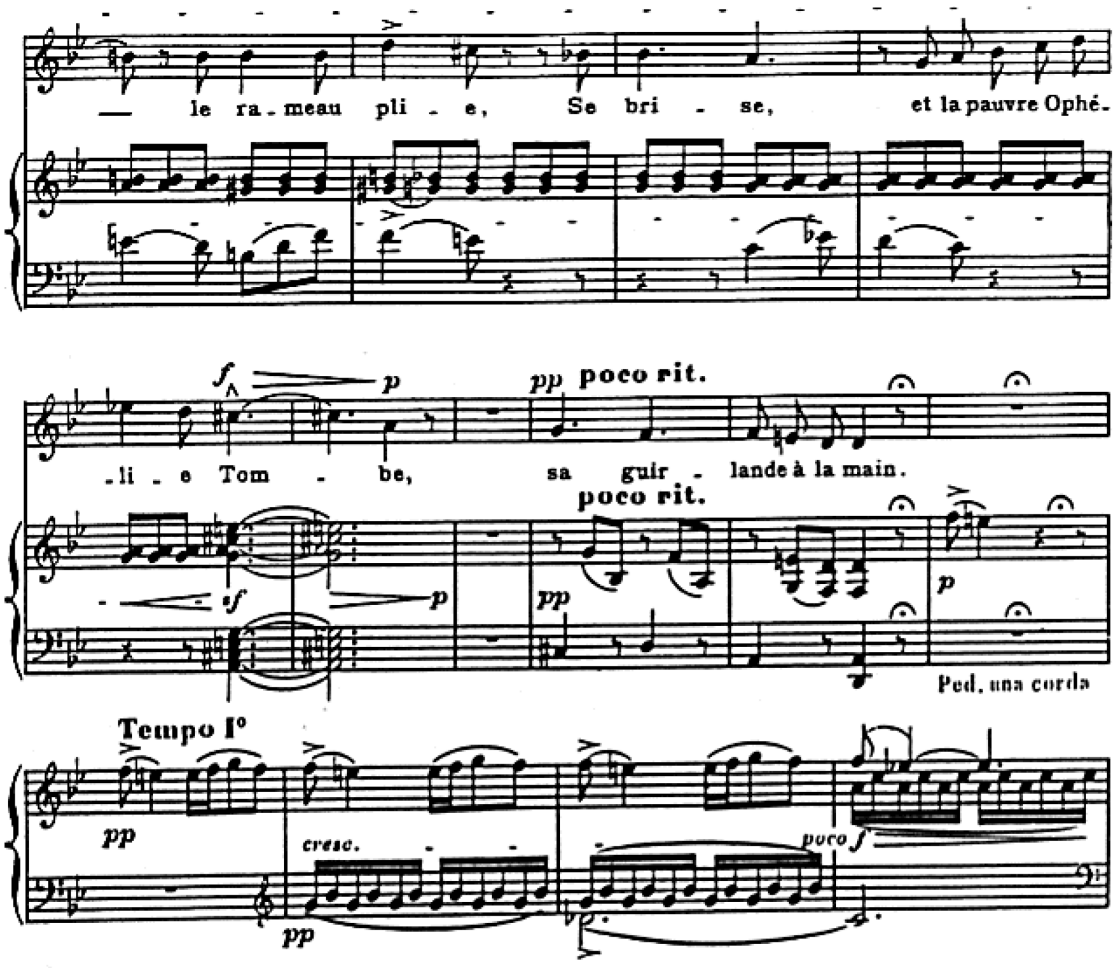
Example 1.10. *La Sonnambula*. Act II, scene 2, Aria: Ah! Non giunge…

Skipping dotted rhythms reflect the happiness of Amina's feelings over bouncy orchestral accompaniment loping along at allegro moderato. The scene harkens back to the opening of the opera when all was innocent and pure, implying a satisfying redemption in a happy ending.



Example 1.11. La mort d'Ophélie.

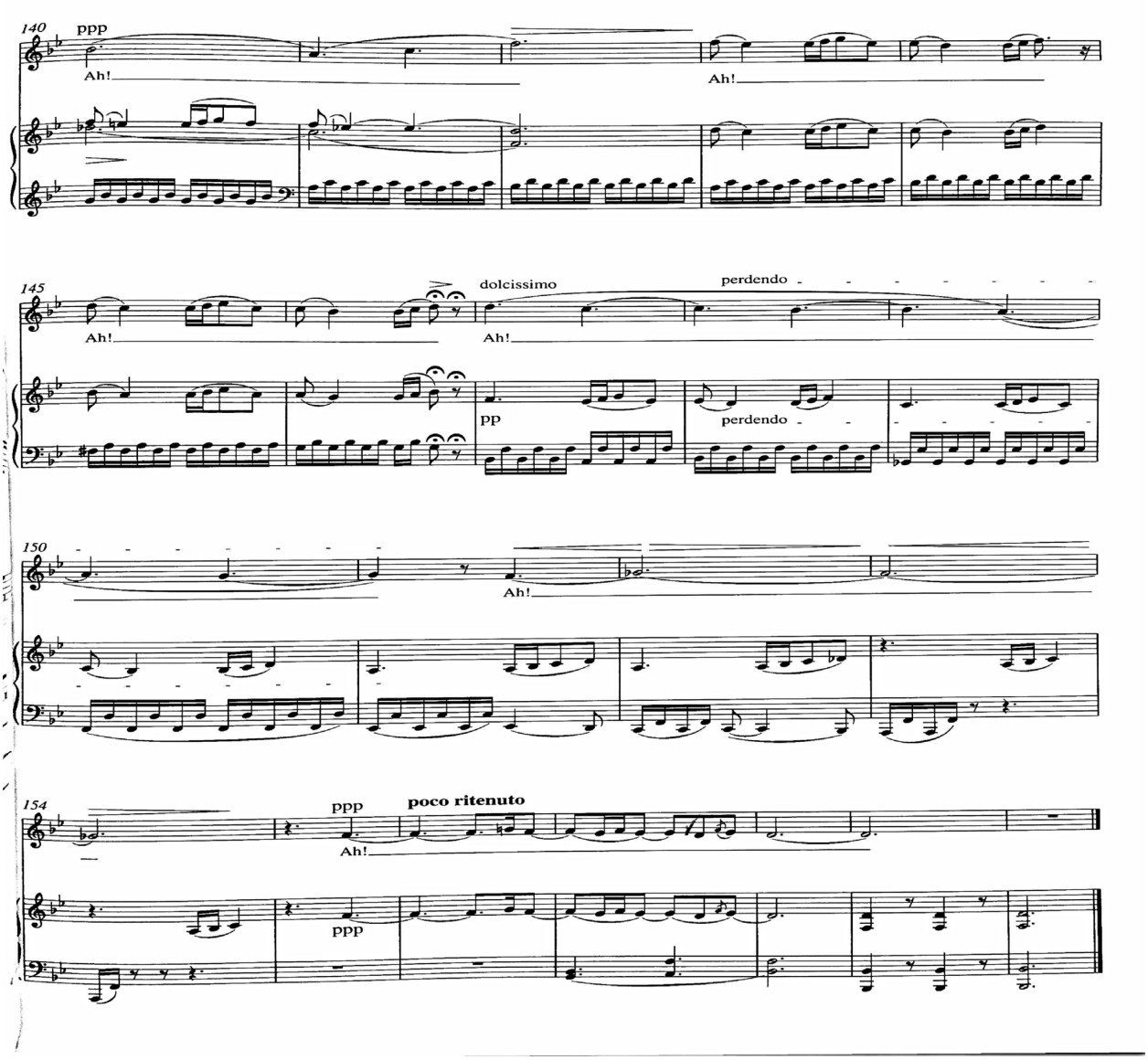
In measure 25, “mort” is colored with a f minor resolution, foreshadowing Ophelia’s death. The piano then begins what will become Ophelia’s strange theme. Ophelia joins in on the second measure of the tune, but drops out (distracted?) briefly, before rejoining, and both piano and voice abruptly stop before continuing on in a flowing descending line. Ophelia drops out again, leaving the thought of the tune to the piano which sinks lower yet.



Example 1.12. La mort d’Ophélie.

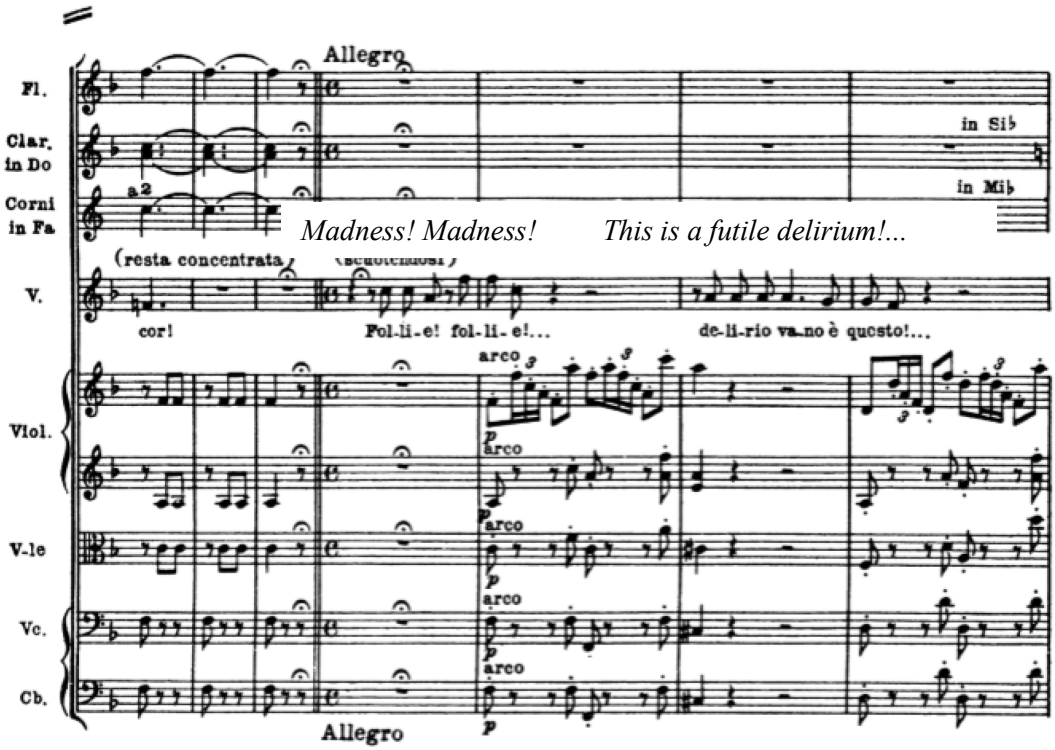
The accompaniment drives in steady eighth notes as the climax of Ophelia’s fall into the water approaches in the first and second systems escalating to a horrified “tombe” described through crescendo, marcato, sforzando, and thick harmony. A moment of silence is observed in the measure of rest that follows. Gertrude then mentions the garland still in Ophelia’s hand, a possible inference to Ophelia’s

pointless grasp on lost innocence, as well as Ophelia's incurable state of insanity which ultimately causes her death. Before the 3rd verse starts, the piano tentatively takes up Ophelia's tune as Gertrude continues to describe the distracted Ophelia's dress billowing momentarily upon the water. In verse 4, Gertrude describes Ophelia's strange tune (heard still in the piano) as her dress gets heavy with the weight of the water and she sinks seemingly oblivious to her plight. The piano accompaniment moves into lower octaves in contrast to Gertrude's higher pitched exclamation on "l'abîme" which creates a sense of spatial depth.



Example 1.13. La mort d'Ophélie.

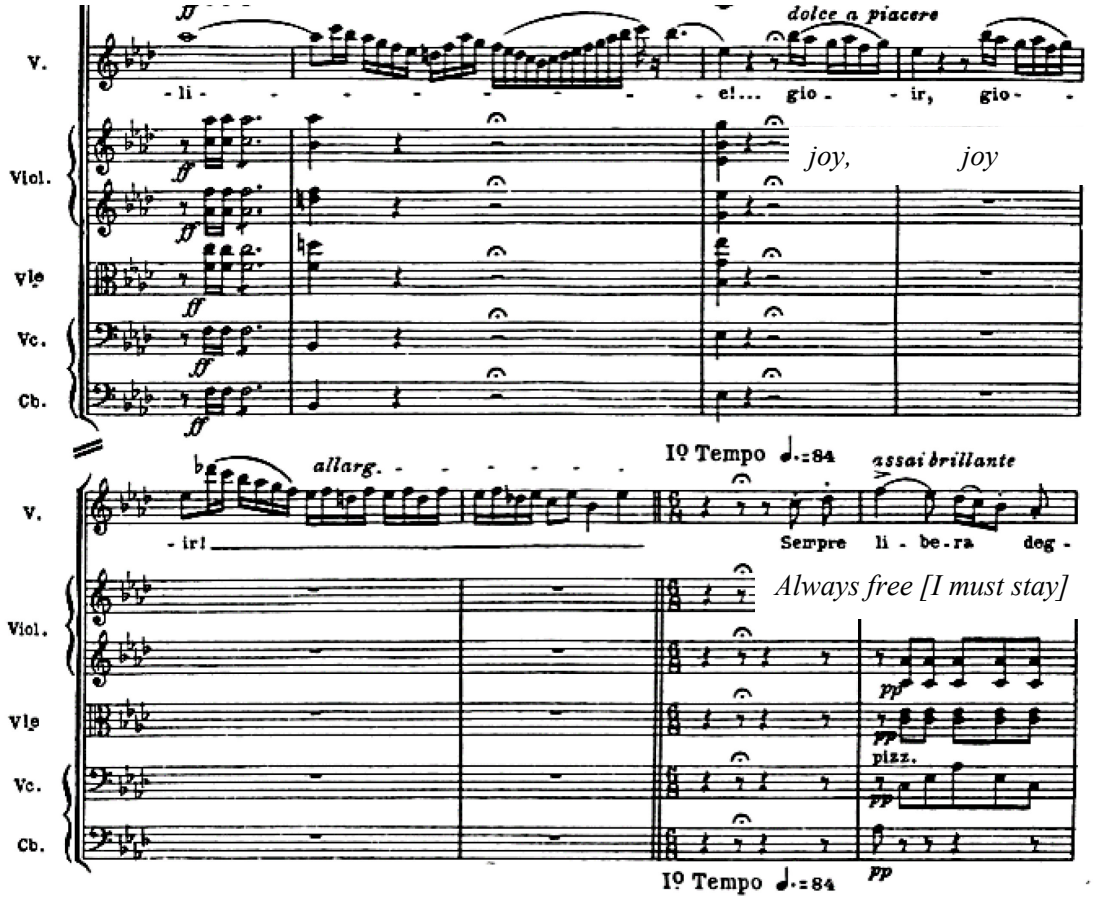
After Ophelia drowns, the melody is taken up in the piano again, but this time, Ophelia's voice is heard in a heavenly upward line of harmony. She is dead, she is released from her tune. When she does join the theme, she sings it a third above the original melody still being played by the piano. And rather than continuing the tune in her voice after the fermata, she slowly sinks down in step-wise motion, murkily suspended between the F and Gb chromaticism halfway down before joining in unison with her melody played in the piano---a final resting place at the bottom of her watery tomb---secured by three simple chords returned to the opening key's tonic.



Example 1.14. La Traviata: Act I, recitative.

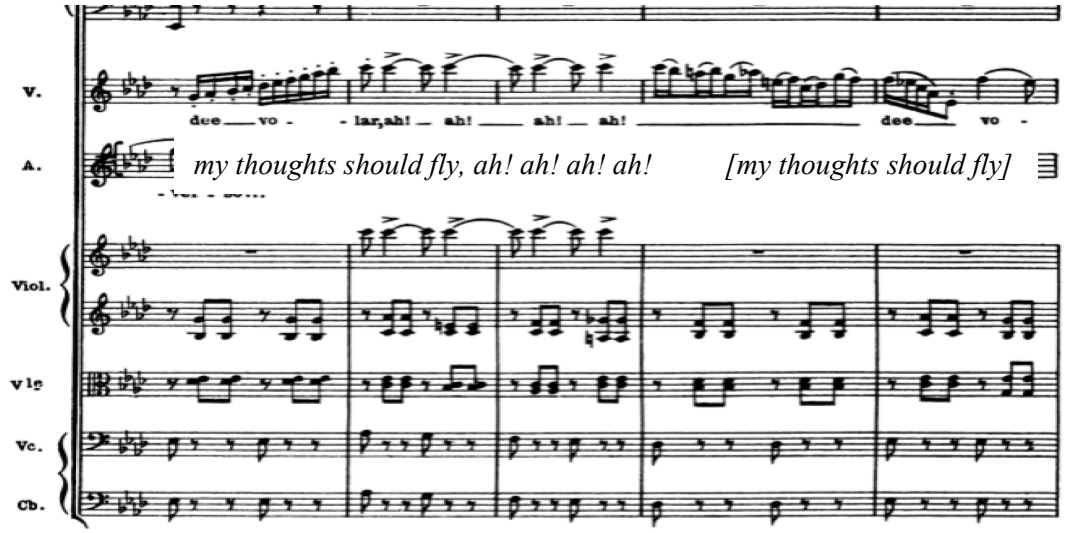
Notice the silence in the orchestra as Violetta exclaims "folie", followed by terse staccato with wide leaps in the violin amidst agitated rhythms. This reflects her true state of mind underneath the façade of reason in her relatively static range and repeated notes of "delirio vano è questo". The orchestra belies the sentiment of her feelings even while she herself attempts to adhere to her words.[33]

[33] Giuseppi Verdi, "La Traviata Act I," IMSLP Petrucci Music Catalogue, , accessed March 1, 2018, http://ks.imslp.net/files/imglnks/usimg/e/e1/IMSLP113749-PMLP16223-Verdi_-_La_Traviata_-_Act_I.pdf. 80-107.



Example 1.15. La Traviata, Act I.

Violetta works hard to convince herself again and again that she should be happier being free, uncoupled in love. But look at the tessitura of "gioir". The word is repeated sweetly and easily as if a trivial and urbane thought. However, it's placed high in her voice, musing on her emotional joy in the allargando before decisively declaring her independence in the new time signature and tempo of the aria.

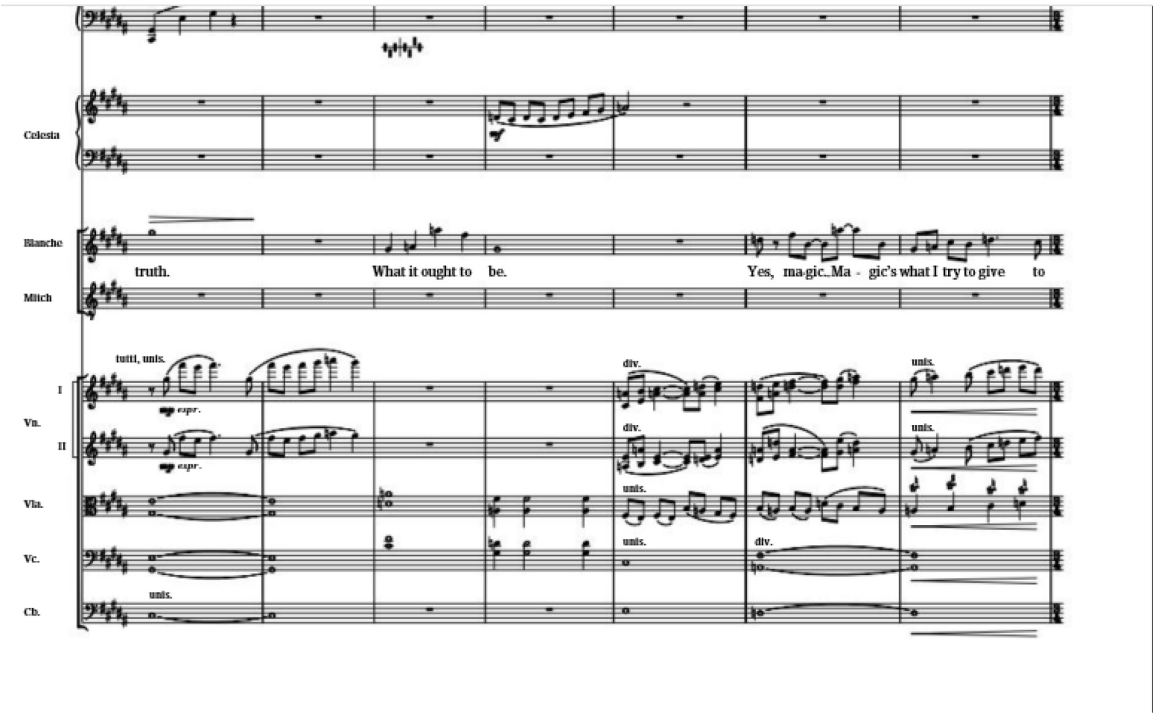


Example 1.16. La Traviata, Act I, Aria: Sempre libera.

Near the end of the aria, Violetta attempts to drown out Alfredo's love song heard from the street below. She expands her range and defiantly accents "ah" to bolster her resolve. But as we will see later in the opera, this apparent successful "win" on her part, so early in the opera, will give way to true love, and for a time, the couple will live her idealized life together. But, because of her status and because of her illness[34], she will succumb to a tragic ending.

[34] Interestingly, tuberculosis symptoms display bouts of mania and fatigue, not unlike madness.

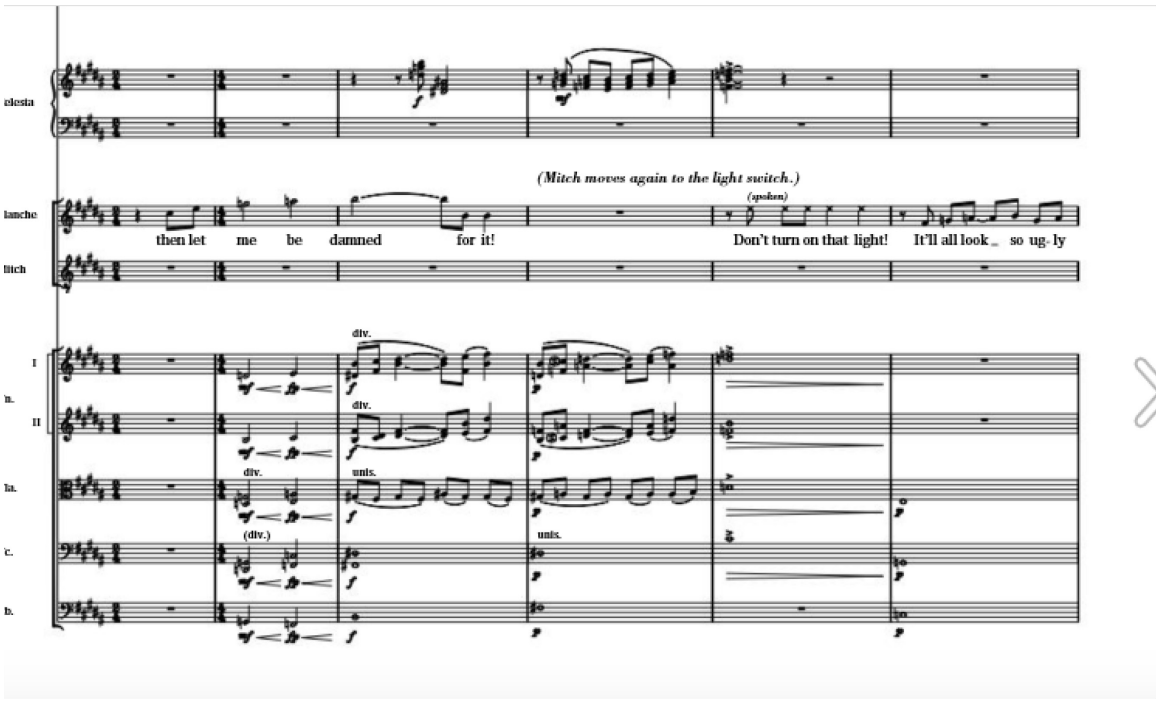
A STREETCAR NAMED DESIRE, PREVIN



Example 1.17. *A Streetcar Named Desire*, Act III, scene 2, Aria: I want magic![35]

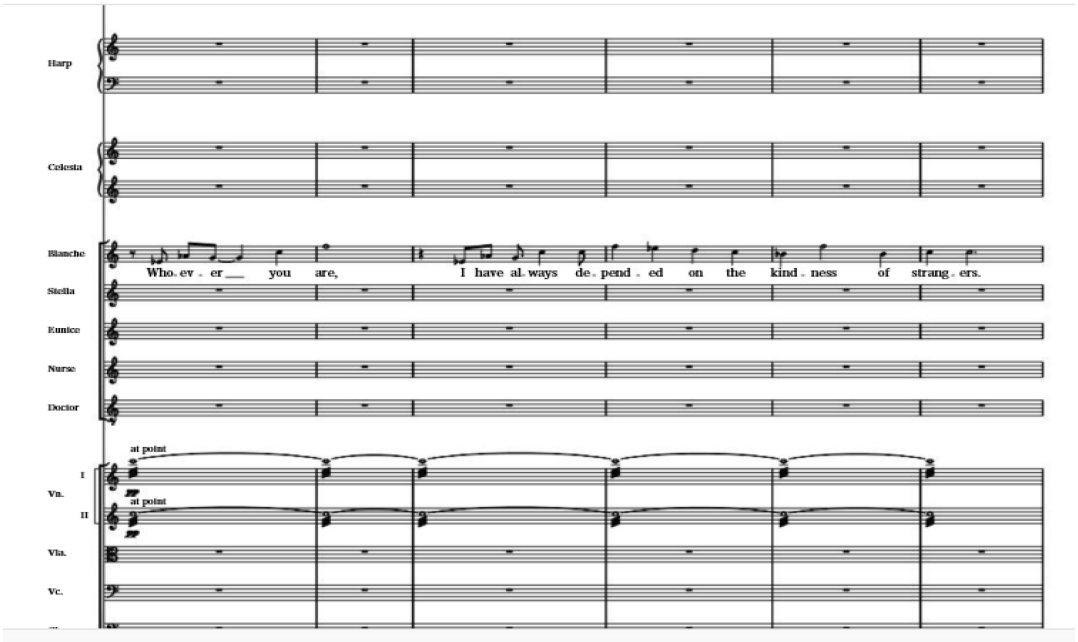
In a largely lush orchestral score, Blanche swoops and glides her way through dreamy melodies and wistful carelessness. In example 1.17, she grows excited as she shares her beliefs with Mitch. Notice the angular ascent and descent in "what it ought to be". She continues to stir herself up with the following faster rhythmic section "yes, magic, magic's what I try to give to people". This is fortified by the orchestral motion that precedes and accompanies her thought.

[35] "Previn STREETCAR NAMED DESIRE ACT III," ScoresOnDemand, Issuu, September 9, 2013, accessed March 01, 2018, https://issuu.com/scoresondemand/docs/streetcar_named_desire_act_iii_3169.

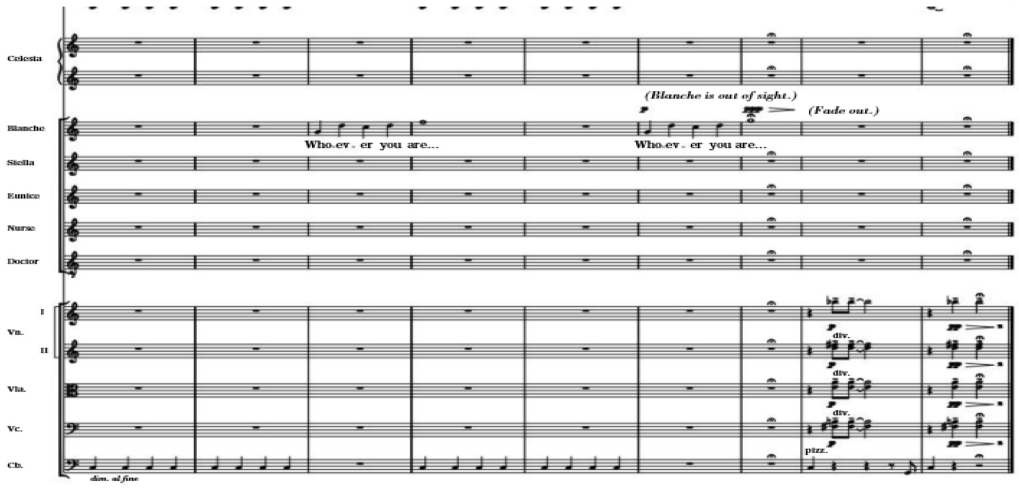


Example 1.18. ***A Streetcar Named Desire*****, Act III, scene 2, Aria: I want magic!**

Here, Blanche ruins the mood with another desperate attempt to disguise her insecurity. In a way, she's being honest with Mitch about her true feelings, but rather than fully confront her inner demons, she fears a greater truth, represented by the exposure to the light. The notes are mid-range and lack the soaring of the previous lines she wished to spin. After this, she attempts various tactics to continue her façade by suggesting moonlight or candlelight as better options.



Example 1.19. ***A Streetcar Named Desire*****, Act III, final scene**



Example 1.20. ***A Streetcar Named Desire*****, Act III, final scene**.

In these last lines of the opera, Blanche addresses the doctor, clearly not understanding that she'll be taken away to the insane asylum. She continues to vaguely repeat "whoever" until she fades out of sight, out of sound, and out of mind.

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